

No. 18

June 10, 1997

S. 419 – Birth Defects Prevention Act of 1997

S. 419 is pending before the Senate Labor Committee. No report.

NOTEWORTHY

- The Senate today is expected to begin consideration of S. 419, the Birth Defects Prevention Act, if consent is gained to discharge the bill from committee.
- S. 419 is intended to prevent birth defects by developing and implementing new prevention and surveillance strategies.
- Senator Bond, the bill's sponsor, will seek unanimous consent to substitute the text of S. 419 as introduced with a substitute. The substitute is similar to language that was approved by the Committee on Labor and Human Resources in 1995 and passed the full Senate in September 1996 as part of the "Health Professions Education Consolidation and Reauthorization Act" (S. 555).

BILL PROVISIONS

Section 1. Short Title; Findings.

The short title of the bill is the "Birth Defects Prevention Act of 1997."

Findings include the following:

- "Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality, directly responsible for one out of every five infant deaths."

- “Thousands of the 150,000 infants born with a serious birth defect annually face a lifetime of chronic disability and illness.”
- “Birth defects threaten the lives of infants of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.”
- “Birth defects can be caused by exposure to environmental hazards, adverse health conditions during pregnancy, or genetic mutations.”
- “Public awareness strategies, such as programs using folic acid vitamin supplements to prevent spina bifida and alcohol avoidance programs to prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, are essential to prevent the heartache and costs associated with birth defects.”

Section 2. Programs Regarding Birth Defects.

This section authorizes a number of programs, as follows:

- The bill establishes regional birth defects research programs to provide the comprehensive surveillance data and epidemiologic research needed to study clusters of birth defects, identify their causes, and develop and evaluate prevention efforts.
- The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) is directed to operate regional centers for the conduct of applied epidemiological research on the prevention of birth defects. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is established as the coordinating agency for birth defects surveillance and prevention activities.
- The bill authorizes grants to public and nonprofit entities to develop new public awareness strategies to reduce the incidence of birth defects. The Secretary of HHS is directed to establish and maintain a National Information Clearinghouse on Birth Defects to collect and disseminate to health professionals and the general public.
- Funding is provided to public entities to collect, analyze, and make available data on birth defects, including data on the causes of such defects and on their incidence and prevalence.
- To carry out the purposes of this section, appropriations are authorized in the amounts of \$30 million for fiscal year 1998, \$40 million for fiscal year 1999, and such sums as may be necessary for fiscal years 2000 and 2001.

COST

No cost data was available at press time.

ADMINISTRATION POSITION

No Administration position was available at press time.

POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS

No amendments are expected.

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